

Youth in the Great Outdoors

Connecting with California's Future



Bureau of Land Management



A Youth Initiative



There is an urgent priority to get kids outdoors...

There are about 11 million young people in California between the ages of 6 to 25. In the 6-11 year age group, about 30 percent are considered overweight or obese. The rate of obesity among this age group has quadrupled over the last 25 years. While there are a number of causes, a significant part of the answer is that children spend much more time indoors, with much less access to nature and the great outdoors.



This “disconnection” between youth and the outdoors is not only a health concern, it also affects the future of America’s public lands. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar recently noted that young people “are the future conservation leaders in the United States of America” when he launched the new “Youth in the Great Outdoors” initiative. The goal of the initiative is to involve youth in public land management as well as hire young people to “help protect America’s Treasured Landscapes, build our new renewable energy frontier, and empower Native American communities.”

In response, BLM field offices in California are stepping up their efforts to get young people more involved with the many experiences and benefits of interacting with the natural world. The strategy for this youth initiative encompasses a number of efforts, such as successful programs like the BLM’s national “Take It Outside!” and “Hands on the Land,” a network of field classrooms connecting students, teachers, and parents to their public lands.



BLM is partnering with the California Department of Parks and Recreation to increase the number and variety of opportunities for California children to experience and benefit from interacting with the natural world. Likewise, the BLM membership on the Roundtable for Recreation, Parks, and Tourism has contributed to the promotion of the Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights, a list of basic experiences that every child should have enjoyed by the end of his or her 14th year.

To engage young people more deeply in the work of the BLM and to encourage better stewardship of the public lands, BLM-California is working with the Student Conservation Association, the California Conservation Corps, and schools across the state to employ youth in all aspects of conservation, restoration, and land management. It is expected that several hundred young people will be hired during 2010.



Overall, BLM-California manages about 60 programs as part of the overall Youth Initiative effort. Those programs reach almost 274,000 young people in California annually. The following summaries highlight a few of the efforts underway to help youth in California explore and enjoy the natural world on their public lands.

There are 13 BLM “Hands on the Land” projects across California providing a diverse array of hands-on learning opportunities for teachers and students to experience the rich historical, archeological and environmental learning opportunities available on public lands. For example, the BLM’s San Joaquin River Gorge management area works with the Sierra Mono Museum to provide interpretive programs highlighting the local natural and cultural environments, focusing on the traditional lifeways of the Western Mono or “Nim” people.

In the Redding Field Office, the Clear Creek Field Classroom offers events like collecting acorns, a demonstration of acorn use by local native Wintu, and planting of oak seedlings and acorns for oak woodland restoration.

In the Bishop Field Office, in the Fish Slough Area of Critical Environmental Concern, students learn about pupfish found nowhere else in the world and try to interpret ancient petroglyphs or rock art carved by early Native Americans.



Take it Outside!

There are 19 “Take It Outside!” projects in California, such as the upcoming Bishop Field Office partnership with the Disabled Sports Eastern Sierra’s outdoor education program, working to provide special needs youth with outdoor physical activities and environmental education (photos on cover).

In the Ridgecrest Field Office, the BLM is one of many community partners involved in the Sand Canyon Environmental Program, donating use of equipment and providing expertise to engage 4th graders in meaningful outdoor experiences. Each year, the program impacts about 1,600 students, parents, teachers, and community volunteers.

The California Desert District is actively involved in “Linking Girls to the Land” by participating with Girl Scouts of America in “Leave No Trace” training and working toward merit badges. On January 30, more than 4,800 Girl Scouts and their families attended the San Geronio Girl Scout Council’s 1st annual B.I.G. (Believe in Girls) Expo at the Ontario Convention Center. The BLM offered a variety of activities from firefighting, horse care, and hiking adventures.



Interpretation

With new funding in 2010, the King Range National Conservation Area hopes to set up a Junior Interpreter Program to teach junior high students about the natural and cultural resources of the Lost Coast. The day-to-day operation of the program will be run by a college intern hired through the Student Education Employment Program and majoring in Interpretation. Students will teach other students from outside the area, such as San Francisco Bay Area inner city schools, and families visiting during the summer months about the area's resources.

Working with the Central Modoc River Center, the Alturas Field Office hopes to fund a crew leader to coordinate with the Modoc National Forest's youth programs to assemble and install on the ground interpretive signs.

The "Getting To Know Nature" idea at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve near Palm Springs is designed to provide students, families and educators with improved interpretive materials about the natural world of the preserve, which receives over 60,000 visitors each year.



Hiring Young People

BLM-California offers internship opportunities in a variety of disciplines. One such intern is Jennifer Bartlau who collected seeds for the "Seeds of Success" program at the Pine Hill Preserve. Jennifer, part of a five-month conservation and land management internship through the Chicago Botanic Garden and BLM at the Pine Hill Preserve, was exposed to multiple aspects of preserve management, including weed removal, and Geographic Information Systems, and Global Positioning System technologies.

BLM-California is actively participating in the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) program, a prestigious two-year paid government fellowship sponsored by the Office of Personnel Management for recent graduate students to work in a U.S. government agency. For example, Ashley Conrad-Saydah and Sarah Quinn are working in BLM-California's Renewable Energy Coordination Office, assisting with the development of BLM's renewable energy program and working on project-specific environmental compliance issues.

Cal Poly students and faculty are playing a vital role in the restoration of the Piedras Blancas Light Station. Landscape architecture students have drawn up restoration plans for their senior projects. Journalism students, through their "PR Perspectives" program, are developing materials for public education, marketing and advertising. Mechanical engineering students are constructing a replica of a historic water tower and making a model of the clockwork mechanism from the lighthouse's lens that will be displayed at the light station to educate the public on how it works. Students doing this work are receiving academic credit and hands-on, real-world experience.



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Bureau of Land Management
2800 Cottage Way, Suite W1623
Sacramento, CA 95825
(916) 978-4400